



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
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Working with text

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Reading Potamius

- Potamius: active middle of 4th C CE, bishop of Lisbon. Initially positive toward Arianism, but in his later career aligned with Church doctrine
- Generally only attracted interest from 4th C-focussed church historians and linguists
- Works recently edited with translation and commentary
- *Epistula de Substantia*: a theological text on the unity of the trinity using weaving metaphors extensively. Recently edited by M. Conti in *Instrumenta Patristica*

Potam. *de Subst.* 5.5

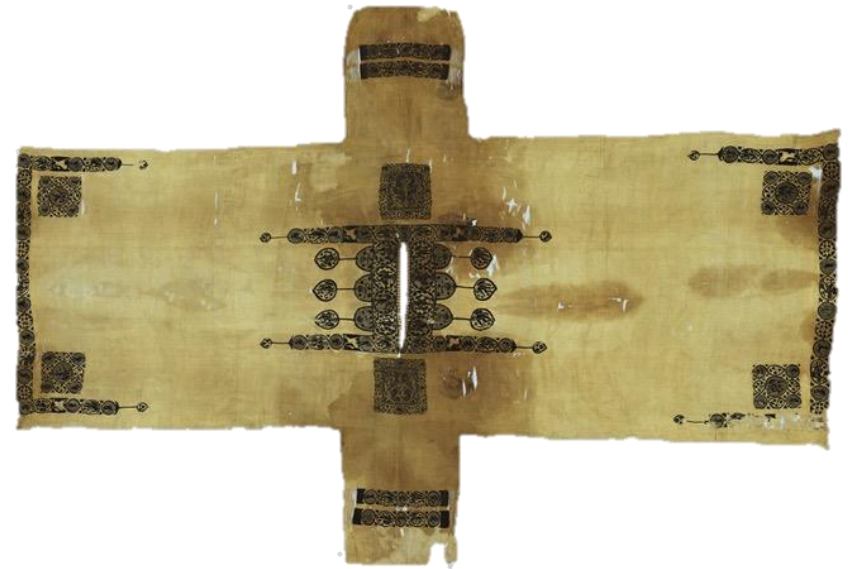
For the women learn to suspend tunic weaves on the bar of the loom as if on the beam of the cross. And truly, the web of the growing cloth is stretched out on the loom in likeness of the cross in a miraculous sign. Through the type of spacing [of the warp] with no-cut sides for the sleeves, and the care of the weaver's hands, its seamless nature and its threads are preserved. For the tunic itself is organised in the shape of a cross, so that the object itself presages its task.

Conti, 1998, 91, on *de Subst.* 5.5

- “The entire passage appears to be extremely stilted and obscure. Our hypothesis with regard to the general meaning of this disconcerting fusion of theological reflections and technical language of textiles is the following [...]”

Potam. *de Subst.* 5.5

nam ipso telae patibulo feminae quasi in crucis ambitu pendere tunicas discunt. et uere ad similitudinem crucis facturae uestis insigni miraculo tela praetenditur, cuius per qualitatem spatii indiscissis pinnarum lateribus, procurante pollice praesidentis, **insuitas** et fila seruantur. nam et tunica ipsa quae in habitu crucis orditur, ut probat res officio, prius quam organa textrini et **subfarcimenta** telae contigerit naturali iam tegmine uestis est Saluatoris.



Above: Cross-shaped tunic from Late Roman Egypt, Metropolitan Museum New York

Left, image after: B. Köstner, 'Auf Tuchfühlung' T. 2, *Experimentelle Archäologie in Europa, Jahrbuch* 2016, 179.

The next problem: de Subst. 9

- “The passage displays a heavy use of technical terms, which sometimes makes the sentences extremely obscure” (Conti, 1998, 98)

Conti's translation

The loom, which is united to the cloth and connected to itself, holds the thread and is bound together in a totally indissoluble bond: it is bound and it binds. It provides the suspended tunic with proper form while it is being woven. It is repaired and it repairs, it weaves and is woven, it is clothed and it clothes, it begins to weave and it sets the threads in order. Under the line of the covering it sets in motion the beam placed crosswise with the entire warp, by means of the hooks with which it is fastened it holds the threads in place. One comes between, the other separates off. One is interwoven, the other sets the pattern. Each of them takes the threads of cloth descending from the loom. One grasps and leaves hold of the former cloth while it runs through them both, the other marks the end of the latter by binding it fast: both equally return, and they never hamper each other. In any event the weft of this tunic, which is more rigid because of its unity and is held up by the twofold stem when in use, is constantly bound.

De Subst. 9

organum telae unitum, sibimet conexum, fila retinet, omni tenacitate uincitur; alligatur et alligat. modum pendenti tunicace, dum conectitur praestat. sarcitur et sarcit, textit et textitur, uestitur et uestit, orditur et liciat. sub tegminis lineam transuersum latus exacuit **staminis fibula**, morsu quo tenetur adstringit. unus interuenit, alter intercipit. alius interfunditur, unus incurrit. utrumque panniculas decurrentes accipiunt. unus unum, dum per ambos curritur, adprehendit et refugit; alter alium, dum stringit, includit: ambo aequae redeunt, nec offendunt. semper tamen tunicae istius de unitate rigentior trama, quae in se sibi per sua uicissim commercia bifido traduce suspenditur, uinculatur.

Investigating terminology



Investigating practice



The next problem: *de Subst.* 9

“The clasp of the warp gives a point to that part [of the warp] which has crossed the line of the weft; it ties [the newly inserted weft thread] down with a grip which holds it in place. One [weft] thread runs inbetween [the warp], another runs towards it. Yet another [weft] thread is drawn between [the two halves of the warp in the open shed], another runs into it [i.e. meets it being inserted from the opposite direction after the shed has been changed]. Both welcome the [warp-]threads running downwards. These catch and run away from each other, as the loom is run through both ways [i.e. through both of its shed settings]. One [thread] encloses another, as it tightens, both [parts of the warp] fall back evenly, and one does not hinder the other.”